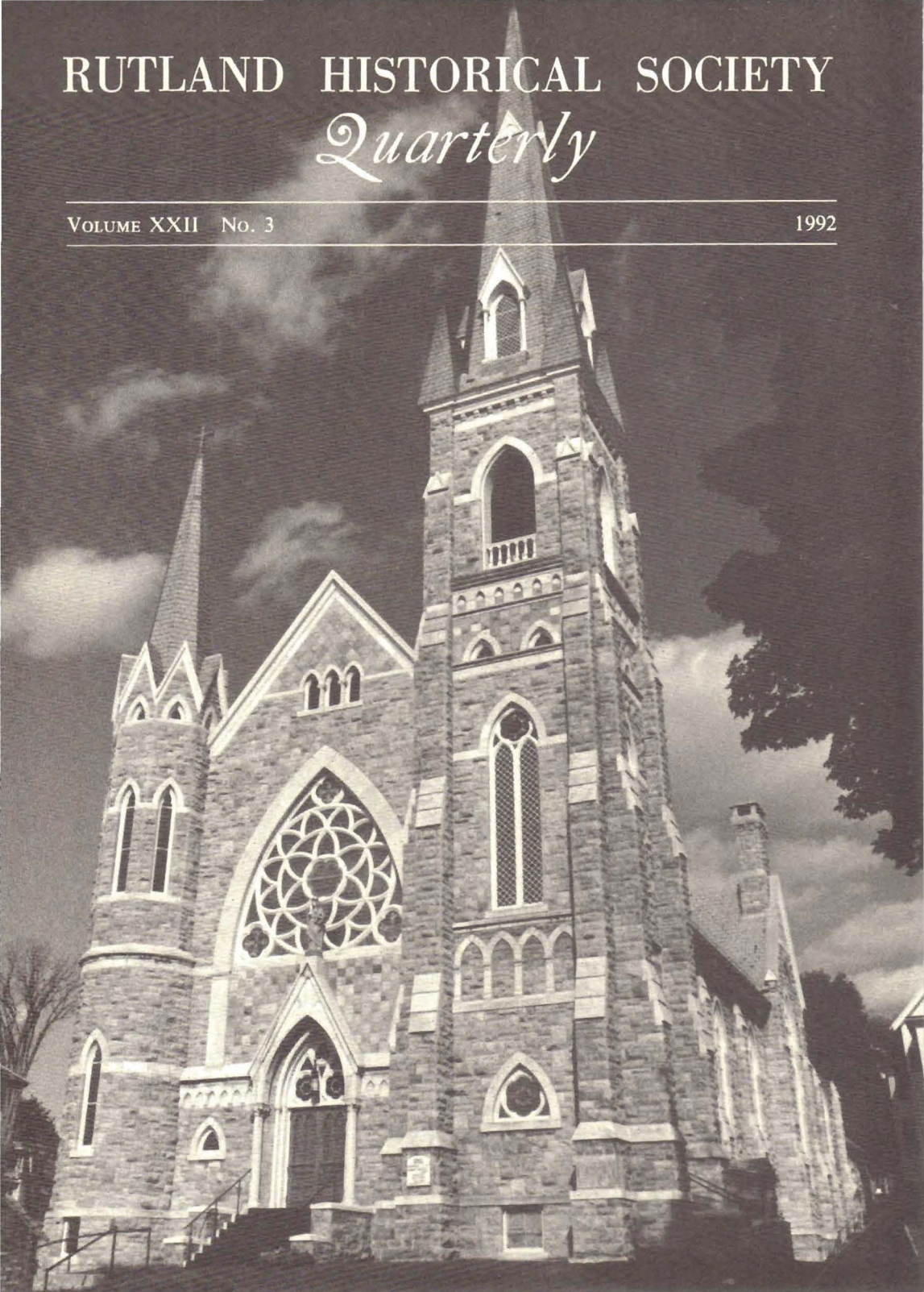


RUTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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VERMONT DIVISION FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY

Le Sacré Coeur de Marie

by Eleanor J. Elwert and James P. Mongeon

Two hundred feet above street level the gold cross of Immaculate Heart of Mary Church has stood silent sentinel over the city of Rutland for almost one hundred years. The church sits on the crest of the hill one block from the original tavern and Court House of the Revolutionary era. The commercial center of the city, established after the arrival of the railroad by 1850, spreads out before the church and its spire in the valley below.

The commerce brought by the Rutland Railroad attracted many people not only from around Vermont but also from Canada. According to the 1850 census there were about 50 French Canadians in the town of Rutland, out of a population of 3700. Over the next 40 years their numbers grew, as did the region, so that by 1890 the total population was 11,700.

In 1892 two important events occurred. First, Rutland Town and Rutland City had become separate entities. Proctor and West Rutland had already become separate. The original colonial land grant of 1761 no longer existed. The second event was the construction of the new marble French Church, Le Sacré Coeur de Marie, a monument to the French Canadian culture in Rutland.

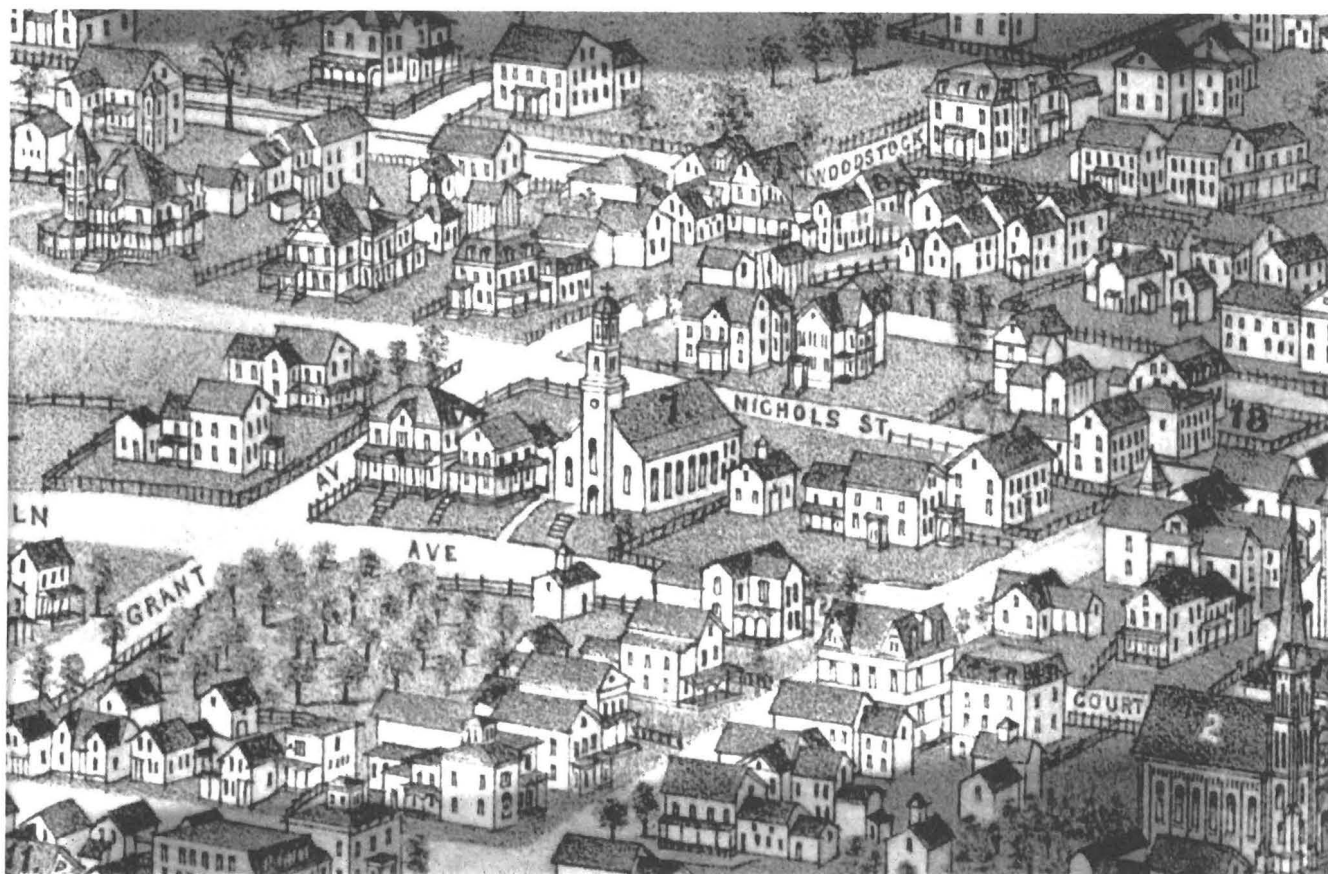
While a priest did visit Rutland as early as 1830 (Father Jeremiah O'Callaghan), it was not until 1853 that Mass was offered on a fairly regular basis to the French speaking Catholics. Such families in Rutland in 1852 included Pierre Allain, Henry Branchaud, William Laliberte and Joseph Mailhoit at whose home Father Joseph Quevillon first said Mass. Thereafter, he came every three or four months during 1853 and 1854 to say Mass at the Court House on Main Street.

In November 1854 Rev. Zephyrin Druon came to Rutland and was instrumental in the building of St. Peter Church on Meadow Street. The French took an active part in this parish along with the English speaking members. In 1863, when St. Peter's pastor, Father Charles Boylan, was planning a new St. Peter church, many French Canadians contributed to that project.

Early Years

According to an article in the *Rutland Herald* of 17-23 November 1868, "Owing to the increased number of Catholics in Rutland, the congregation has been divided . . . and the Rev. George N. Caissy has secured a beautiful spot where a new Catholic Church will be commenced next spring for the use of the French Canadians." Father Caissy had found, through a census, about 50 families who could be the nucleus of the parish.

Bishop Louis de Goesbriand was anxious about the spiritual welfare of the Canadians in southern Vermont. In the Bishop's diary during 1869 he notes several instances of himself and other French speaking priests conducting missions to bring the sacraments to people in the towns of the county.



First Sacré Coeur de Marie Church—white painted wooden clapboard building—1870

Eventually, Rev. Louis G. Gagnier was named pastor of this new parish and beginning on 20 April 1869 the congregation gathered for Mass at Chaffee's Hall which they rented. It was at the corner of Merchants Row and Center Street on the second floor.

In 1867 Lincoln Avenue had been laid out and available for development. One of the first homes was built for William and Mary Wardwell. Father Gagnier bought the two-story house that would become a rectory for the priests who were now serving the French speaking people in Fair Haven, West Rutland, Castleton and other nearby towns.

To provide more land for a church, Father Gagnier purchased the property just south of the rectory lot. The parish now owned 141 feet of frontage on Lincoln Avenue to a depth of 150 feet. Construction of a wooden church was begun as services continued to be held at Chaffee's Hall through the winter. On 23 April 1870 the first Mass was offered in the new church. (Most likely this was Easter Sunday.)

The white clapboard building was 100 feet long by 50 feet wide and rested on a marble foundation. The main door, beneath the steeple, was centered between two windows lighting the small vestibule. Five equally spaced windows on each side gave natural light to the interior. There were plain wooden floors, varnished pews to seat about 600 and walls painted to resemble natural wood. Two large woodburning stoves and kerosene lamps provided some comfort. The main altar was varnished oak with gold highlights. It was flanked by smaller altars on each side, one dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary and the other to St. Joseph, as was the custom.

On 1 October 1870 Rev. Jerome M. Cloarec became the pastor but remained only ten months. He had been named pastor of St. Joseph parish in Burlington where he remained for 48 years until 1920. (Under his guidance the new St. Joseph Church was built in 1883; it remains the largest church in Vermont.)

Despite the depression in the mid-1870s the Sacré Coeur de Marie congregation continued to grow, numbering 263 families in 1888 when Rev. Norbert Proulx became pastor. It was already clear that a new, larger building was needed. The necessary first step was to buy more land. A new spirit of enthusiasm moved the parishioners to make plans to raise funds to build a substantial edifice.

The New Church

The architect chosen for the new church was George H. Guernsey of Montpelier and the Granite Construction Company was the contractor. Work began in the early fall of 1891 and the 150 feet by 60 feet foundation was completed by June 1892. The cornerstone was blessed by Bishop John Stephen Michaud on 18 August 1892 before a very large crowd, which included members of all the various denominations in Rutland.

This church is a fine example of High Victorian Gothic style which was prevalent in the last quarter of the 19th century. "The almost exclusive use of masonry, lively wall surface patterns in contrasting colors, ornate large buttresses,

window tracery, pointed arch windows and doorways and an abundant use of stained glass."¹ are typical and are clearly illustrated in this building. So, too, is the immense rose window over the front entrance.

The building was a long way from being finished. Fund-raising continued, of course, with a bazaar, pew rent, special collections and the pastor's contribution of his salary, to help meet the expenses for the year of \$8,204. The deficit was \$626 and the total debt for the year was \$2,948, which included funds used to increase the seating capacity in the old building. The True Blue Marble Company of West Rutland donated a railroad carload of its finest building marble.

By 29 June 1893 the gray and blue marble walls had been erected and the wooden roof was finished and ready for slating. The towers were already several feet above the roof. But on 29 August 1893 a catastrophe took place. Hurricane-force winds struck Rutland but with little damage except to the new church. The velocity of the wind had increased during the night and by 8:00 a.m. the framework for the spire and the large staging around it were blown to the ground. Fortunately, the workmen had taken refuge in a shed.

Some of the heavy timbers pierced the roof of the rectory, went through the dining room where Father Proulx was seated and imbedded themselves into the ground in the cellar. Other smaller timbers also went through the roof. Nearly every room was wrecked.

Plans for the rectory to be placed on the site of the old church had to be altered. Instead, the house (and lot) at 13 Nichols Street was purchased on 28 September 1894 to be a rectory. In 1902 Dr. Alberic Bellerose sold for \$10.00 the land south of the rectory (now part of the parking lot). This purchase was a welcome gift to the parish.

In December 1964 the parish bought from Richard Reardon the house and lot on the corner of Grant Avenue and Lincoln Avenue to be used as a rectory. The old rectory became an apartment house. The parish now owns all the land bounded by Lincoln Avenue, Grant Avenue and Nichols Street, except the houses and yards facing West Street.

Work on the second church resumed and by 7 November 1893 the slate roof was finished. Since the basement was to be used for Mass while work continued upstairs, the Stations of the Cross and other furnishings were taken from the old church. Everything was soon ready for the first Mass, Christmas Midnight Mass in 1893.

A large terra cotta statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary, made in Holland, had been set in place over the front entrance toward the end of November 1893. The plastering and other interior work having been finished by then, it was time for the decorators to add the finishing touches. The figure painting and ornamentation of the Sanctuary was under the direction of Mr. M. S. Richer who had been an art student in Paris for five years. It was probably under his direction that the walls and ceiling were decorated in a very florid, ornate style, even to painting frames around the Stations of the Cross and the five large canvases in the Sanctuary. These paintings are still there though the painted frames have been removed.

One painting directly behind and above the altar is the Assumption of Mary into Heaven. On the south side of the altar area is the Nativity of Christ. On the opposite wall is the oil painting of Our Lady of the Rosary with Pope Leo XIII who is kneeling at one side. Over the side altar on the north side is a painting of the Flight into Egypt, while a painting of the Annunciation is over the side altar on the south.

On 24 June 1894 three bells were blessed by Rev. Thomas J. Gaffney, pastor of St. Peter Church, because Bishop DeGoesbriand was unable to come. The large bell was named Jesus, Mary and Joseph. The second bell was named Leo for Pope Leo XIII, Louis for Bishop DeGoesbriand and John for Bishop Michaud. The third bell was named Norbert for Father Proulx.

The next day, 25 June, the bells were placed in the steeple on the southwest corner. This spire is 170 feet tall and 200 feet above street level. The northwest spire is 110 feet tall. Also, at the end of June the stained glass windows arrived and were promptly put into their frames. In 1988 these same beautiful windows would be removed to be totally restored after 95 years in place.

The total cost for the church, excluding land, was \$41,500; the debt was not finally liquidated until 1919. With everything then completed, plans were made for the dedication. Bishop Michaud celebrated a Pontifical High Mass on 4 July 1894 in the new Sacre Coeur de Marie Church. Priests from the surrounding area and the French Canadian parishes in Vermont were in attendance. The sermons were given in French and English to the large crowd of people able to turn out, since it was Independence Day.

In most cases paying for the construction of such a large building is accomplished by collections, bazaars, fairs, subscription drives, donations, special entertainments, bank loans; all were resorted to in meeting the goal which took much longer to reach than was expected.

In the early years the pastors tried to provide a school for the French speaking children. From 1870 to 1886 such schooling was available, usually with French speaking nuns. Other than catechism classes there was no parish school from then until 1948 when a newly-built school greeted the baby boomers. It closed in 1969.

Father Proulx served the parish for 32 years, ably seeing to the maintenance of this outstanding building, making the choir an integral part of the services, encouraging the St. Anne Society and the St. Jean de Baptiste Society which were dedicated to charity and social activities. He was reassigned on 26 March 1920 to become pastor of St. Joseph Church in Burlington.

1920-1940 — Rev. L. A. Vezina

Rev. J. M. Billon served as interim pastor until 2 December 1920 at which time the Rev. L. Albert Vezina was named the pastor. Father Vezina was ordained in 1900 several months before his class at Laval University because of the demand for priests in Vermont. Before coming to Rutland he had been pastor of St. Peter Church in Vergennes. There he had been very active in civic affairs, in particular the celebration marking the centennial of the Battle of Plattsburgh.

He had been instrumental in obtaining a \$15,000 federal appropriation for the erection of the Macdonough Memorial in Vergennes Park.

When he arrived the membership was 1300, plus another 300 in the mission church in West Rutland, Sacred Heart of Jesus. The West Rutland congregation continued to be served until 9 January 1960 when it was transferred to the care of St. Bridget Church, West Rutland. Meanwhile, the new St. Robert Church in Chittenden was associated with the Rutland Church and this arrangement currently continues.

Father Vezina was active in musical circles in the city, serving as president of the Green Mountain Chorus, in addition to being director of the church choir. It is understandable why one of his first improvements was the purchase of a new pipe organ for \$10,000 in 1921. Today a fund to repair this organ is being collected.

The dream of a French Catholic school had not been forgotten, as a fund for that purpose continued to grow. The Great Depression forced a change in that plan since there was not enough money to undertake major construction. In addition, an entire generation of children had grown up for whom French was a foreign language. Becoming "American" was important to children who did not identify with French Canadian culture. In fact, the church and parish were now frequently referred to by the English translation—Sacred Heart of Mary.

Redecoration at Sacred Heart

In the more than forty years since the church had been built, coal soot from the central heating had blackened much of the interior. Age and new ideas about church decoration convinced Father Vezina that a full cleaning and redecorating should be done. The work was authorized in 1938 with rich but subdued design on the walls and ceiling. The interior would be refurbished by washing and repainting the same designs in 1990–1991, as a prelude to a celebration of the 100th anniversary of the dedication of the church.

The final major change made in the interior of the church by Father Vezina was the installation of a marble altar, reredos (screen) and altar rail which replaced the white painted ones in use for many years. Louis Whitehouse, a designer for the Vermont Marble Company, drew up plans, which were brought to the pastor for approval by Rutland resident, Thomas B. McDevitt, a draftsman for the company.

The installation of the new altar consisted of five different varieties of marble: Brocadello, verde antique, rose de Brignoles, and Swanton red, and statuary white for the altar itself which had been completed by mid-1940.

The final improvement had been the replacement of the soot-producing coal furnace with a new oil-burning furnace in 1942. By this time the United States was in the middle of World War II and the attention of everyone turned from parish growth to the war effort and the needs of families.

With the end of World War II, life in the parish returned to normal. Everything was paid for and there was money in the bank; in fact, these funds provided for the possibility of building a school.



c. 1900 Sacré Coeur de Marie—Three statues barely visible. St. Anne with her daughter Mary on left edge of altar steps; to the left of tabernacle is statue of Sacred Heart of Jesus; right of it is statue of Sacred Heart of Mary. Gas lighting fixtures and three workmen visible.



1939—Interior after redecorating. High on left: paintings of the 12 Apostles, six on each side of the nave between columns. New hanging light fixtures; wooden altar painted white; eight statues visible (l. to r.) St. Theresa, St. Anthony with the Child Jesus, St. Joseph with the Child Jesus on side altar, the Sacred Heart of Jesus, angel with candelabra, smaller angels on each side of tabernacle, another angel with candelabra. Out of sight on side altar behind pillar is St. Anne with daughter Mary. Pulpit on left pillar, replaced by wrought iron one, in use until December 1991.

Father Vezina's health, however, had deteriorated and he died of a cerebral hemorrhage on 21 January 1947 at the age of seventy-one. His funeral was held at the church he had renovated and which was seeing its transition from a French Canadian parish, Sacré Coeur de Marie, to an American parish, Sacred Heart of Mary. Remaining with his parishioners, he was buried in the parish cemetery, St. Joseph's. To the parish he left his savings, \$13,500.

Rev. Alfred Desautels—1947–1962

Rev. Alfred L. Desautels was appointed pastor shortly thereafter. He was of French Canadian background and was educated from high school through college and the seminary in Montreal. Father Desautels was a native Vermonter and had served in parishes in northern Vermont. Upon his arrival in Rutland he began efforts to complete Father Vezina's dream of a parochial school. He did accomplish this objective and as a particular consequence, the parish increased from 1900 members in 1951 to 2500 members, as the post-war generation of parents moved in.

Up to this time Sacré Coeur de Marie was still considered to be serving French speaking people; one Mass was still celebrated in French. But soon only English would be used. A change in the direction took place in late 1948 when the name of the parish was officially changed to "Immaculate Heart of Mary" and shortened quickly to "IHM". In 1945 Pope Pius XII had declared the feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary as one for recognition by the universal church; that is, not limited to one country or nationality. In response to a petition, Bishop Edward J. Ryan gave permission for the change.

Monsignor Desautels was stricken by a heart attack on 18 June 1962 after 15 years as pastor and was buried in the priest's lot at St. Joseph's Cemetery on Stratton Road. His passing marked not only a break with the World War II era but came at a time of change in the Roman Catholic Church itself. Pope John XXIII had convened the Second Vatican Council to consider changes in both the liturgy and the focus of the church. The results of that conclave forever changed the Church throughout the world.

Vatican II Brings Change

Into these changes at IHM came Father Leo Poirier. He had been pastor of a small parish in Alburg for 26 years (his only assignment) when he was appointed pastor at IHM. The changes were profound; they were far-reaching and they upset many of the faithful, the older, staunch members in particular. Latin was no longer required for Mass, which certainly made for better comprehension by the congregation. Most notable, however, was the change in the placement of the altar so that the priest faced the people as he offered the sacrifice commanded by Christ at the Last Supper.

This change was not easily made nor aesthetically pleasing in most of the churches already in existence. Churches built since Vatican II have experimented with configurations to bring the people "closer to the action," so to speak. Mostly, they seem less formal, much less monumental than previously, more adaptable to the varied uses required by a vibrant parish. They usually are more constricted

in their employment of works of art and decorative architectural embellishments than was the case before, principally because of the cost. (Contrast the difference in the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Burlington before the fire in February 1972 and its replacement.)

Immaculate Heart of Mary in Rutland has been challenged in this process of adaptation, most particularly in regard to the marble altar, the steps, the reredos and altar rail, which were installed in 1940. Objections by people who donated to that installation forced a change in 1985 to the architect's proposal for a permanent altar to supplant the temporary one in use since 1963. Under the leadership of Rev. Richard W. Tinney, the pastor, a restoration was planned instead of a renovation.

Separating the white marble altar, embellished with Swanton red marble, from the marble steps and away from the reredos has caused the altar to be the center of attention as one enters the church. This is regarded to be exactly as it should be: stunning in its simplicity.

The rest of the marble installed in 1940 has been adapted for use as an ambo (pulpit) and as a stand for the tabernacle. The altar rails provide a separation of the gathering area inside the doors from the church proper. The reredos or screen in the apse represents a superb example of a marble worker's ability as a carver.

The Approaching Anniversary

The approaching anniversary, not to mention maintenance, has again provided an impetus for the restoration and renovation at IHM. The stained glass windows were beginning to come apart at the seams; the floor in the basement, the rest rooms, the inadequate kitchen, not to mention the heat and electrical systems, all needed attention. These and more have been taken care of. The bright, handsome meeting room downstairs is, to the parishioners, a dream come true.

Changes upstairs have included the stripping and revarnishing of all the pews, washing and painting of two coats on all walls and ceiling, underlayment and ceramic tile throughout, plus a new sound system, and new brighter lighting.

The cabinets, formerly in the sacristy containing the priests' vestments, the altar linens and other supplies, have been moved to the back of the church, providing a more convenient and orderly arrangement in preparation for the liturgy. Confessionals, as such, do not exist. One was removed, the other was opened up to be a reconciliation room, in keeping with a more profound understanding of the rite.

Statues have been removed, except for one of the Blessed Virgin Mary presently in the corner where a confessional had been. It is in need of a more proper setting if it is to remain. One of the easiest changes, made in an effort to welcome and accommodate all, was a ramp for wheelchairs accessed by a door already in place in the northeast corner.

No longer the central focus, as it was when it was part of the altar, the tabernacle now has its own place of honor in the Sanctuary. The priest, as head of the assembly, is seated in the center of the Sanctuary on a low platform. The altar of sacrifice is in front, the focus of those gathered for the liturgy.

Discussion had begun in 1984 about the need for updating the various systems in the building, redecorating and changing the placement of the altar. By 1987 Joseph Collura of Saratoga Springs was engaged as the architect. Giancola Construction, Inc. of Rutland was the major contractor. The 950 families—2,850 souls, who are members of IHM have contributed \$426,555 to date by pledging, gifts and memorials.

The total cost was \$767,772. Some individual expenses included:

Kitchen equipment	\$ 2,285
Stained glass repair	81,030
Roof and tower	40,966
Painting	81,000
Bells	14,732
Royal Glass	22,889
Russell—organ repair	63,357
Giancola—contractor	351,150

Ten years ago the Rutland Historical Society began a series of Quarterlies on Rutland's ethnic heritage. The following is from the first issue on the subject:

The specific conditions which caused the emigrants to leave their homelands varied. . . . Once here . . . people of different faiths and tongues erected separate churches. . . . Each immigrant group formed its own social, cultural and benevolent organizations which, while technically not part of the organized churches, were frequently associated with a group's church.

The once extensive cultural diversity of Rutland is now largely a memory. Surnames are often the only reminder of national origin, as languages have been forgotten and customs homogenized. While the early arrivals married only those of the same national origin . . . it is doubtful that national origin is a factor at all in contemporary marriages among the descendants of these immigrants. Many of the churches remain but decreasingly as the focus for people of a specific national origin. . . .

The railroads came, consolidated, prospered and declined. The marble quarries opened, consolidated, prospered and declined. Another early employer, the Howe Scale Company, followed a similar economic path and is now completely gone. These early employers of the immigrants have been assimilated into a larger economy now dominated by the local plants of large national corporations. The immigrants have likewise been assimilated and dispersed in an increasingly homogeneous, mobile society. . . . Immigration to America and to Rutland have been followed by assimilation in America and Rutland.²



Mid-1940—New marble altar, to remain in place for 50 years; new wrought iron ambo (pulpit) with emblem of Holy Spirit in center; in the '90s emblem to be attached to a new marble ambo. Bronze Sanctuary lamp, left of altar, retained with subsequent restorations, as was the wrought iron serving table against wall on right. Statue of Mary on left side altar, even though above her head it says "St. Joseph, ora pro nobis." On right altar is St. Anne with her daughter, Mary.

The Pastors of Sacre Coeur de Marie, Sacred Heart of Mary, and by late 1948, Immaculate Heart of Mary

The Catholic population of Rutland had been attending services at St. Peter Church until April 1869 when Bishop Louis de Goesbriand announced that Rev. Louis G. Gagnier would establish a church for the French-Canadians. He served from 20 April 1869 to 24 September 1870.

Rev. Jerome M. Cloarec.....	1 October 1870-1 August 1871
Rev. Herve Cardinal.....	26 August 1871-30 August 1874
Rev. Louis N. St. Onge.....	December 1874-26 September 1875
Rev. Jerome Gelot.....	1 January 1876-30 June 1886
Rev. George N. Caissy.....	4 July 1886-1 August 1888
Rev. Norbert Proulx.....	13 August 1888-21 May 1920
Rev. J. M. Billon.....	26 March 1920-2 December 1920
Rev. Louis A. Vezina.....	December 1920-21 January 1947
Rt. Rev. Alfred Desautels.....	January 1947-18 June 1962
Rev. Leo F. Poirier.....	July 1962-24 September 1965
Rev. Omer Dufault.....	15 October 1965-4 September 1968
Rt. Rev. John F. Orzel.....	4 September 1968-20 March 1969
Rev. Donald C. Kelly.....	20 March 1969-28 April 1971
Rt. Rev. John A. Lynch.....	28 April 1971-23 June 1982
Rev. Richard W. Tinney.....	23 June 1982-

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AUTHORS

ELEANOR J. ELWERT: native of New York City and environs. Has served the historical society as exhibit chairperson, museum chair; president, 1984-1987 and 1991, to date. Also chaired the building committee that arranged the renovation of Nickwackett Firehouse, present location of the Rutland Historical Society. Author of two issues of the *Quarterly*: "E. B. Livingston", fall of 1981; "The World of LJE", fall issue of 1988.

JAMES P. MONGEON: Parishioner of IHM; lives with his wife and two sons in Rutland. Has been Rutland County State's Attorney since 1980. Is a past president of the Rutland County Stamp Club and member of the Rutland Historical Society. Born and raised in Winooski, Vermont, when Winooski was still predominantly French Canadian. A graduate of UVM, with a law degree from Boston College Law School. His wife, Kathryn, is on the faculty of Mount St. Joseph Academy.



1992—The interior today—note Tabernacle and Sanctuary lamp behind pillar on left.

RUTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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